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'THEMES AND INFLUENCES'
Gary Shinfield
Post-Graduate Diploma in Printmaking 1988

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The project is still the tracing of the inner journey, however the emotional response was found to be only one aspect of the journey. My understanding of the nature of the inner journey is the idea of an ongoing search for higher consciousness, and for a more harmonious and fully realised sense of self. The journey has touched on personal growth and decay, relationships and isolation, meditation and dreams. In early 1988 the proposal was re-examined in the light of work done since I was first awarded the award. At some themes were ongoing, some had undergone change, and some had been abandoned.

A diary has always been used as a source of imagery. Spontaneous documentation is necessary to preserve the truth of the moment, and has led to an interest and study of intuition as a way of working and as a source of visual material. It is not so much the visual format of the diary that has affected image making but rather the immediate, personal and often fragmented nature of the diary. This has been an ongoing theme.

The process of looking inward was found to be connected with the discovery of personal truths and a greater understanding of self. The inner journey is therefore inextricably connected with personal growth. The inner journey and personal growth are two aspects of the same adventure. The way itself is also the goal, as every step has intrinsic value, and so every experience has the potential of becoming a visual image. Meditation has been a vital key to the inner world. As an experience it has led to changing states of consciousness and the awakening of the spiritual search. These have been the major themes in this year's work. I have attempted to translate these experiences into visual imagery. Inherent in the meditative practice is the disengagement of the rational mind and the surrender to the intuitive. So the practice

Introduction

My proposal for the Post-Graduate diploma programme in Printmaking for 1988 was to explore themes and influences. In March 1988 the following themes were proposed:-

1. the emotional response to the inner journey
2. spontaneous documentation in the form of a visual diary
3. personal growth and decay
4. relationships and isolation
5. meditation and dreams

In January 1989 the proposal was re-examined in the light of work done and it was found that some themes were ongoing, some had undergone change and some had fallen away.

The project is still the tracing of the inner journey, however the emotional response was found to be only one aspect of the journey. My understanding of the notion of the inner journey is the idea of an ongoing search for higher consciousness, and, for a more harmonious and fully realised sense of self. The journey has touched on senses, mind and spirit, leading away from emotional concerns to spiritual concerns. It is this emerging interest in spiritualism that has been the major development. There has been an attempt to relate this to both Eastern and Western religious traditions, and, also to consider a personal understanding of religion outside of organised structures.

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The process of looking inward was found to be connected with the discovery of personal truths and a greater understanding of self. The inner journey is therefore unavoidably connected with personal growth. The inner journey and personal growth are two aspects of the same adventure. The way itself is also the goal, as every step has intrinsic value, and so every experience has the potential of becoming a visual image. Meditation has been a vital key to the inner world. As an experience it has led to changing states of consciousness and the awakening of the spiritual search. These have been the major themes in this year's work. I have attempted to translate these experiences into visual imagery. Inherent in the meditative practice is the disengagement of the rational mind and the surrender to the intuitive. So the practice

itself has supported and enriched my interest in working intuitively and has led to an examination of various understandings of the nature of intuition. The following proposed themes - relationships, isolation and dreams - mentioned in points four and five, have not been explored at any length this year.

Early Developments and Influences

The art of Matisse was an important early influence and this has significance for the beginnings of the inner journey. His images created a world of harmony, joyful colour, beauty, dazzling light and richness of environment.

Matisse's art is important in that his work represents a paradise, for me unattainable. The beginning of the inner journey occurred when a goal was established to find my own world of harmony and perfection, and to follow the search wherever it might lead. So the creation of images becomes linked with a search for "a lost paradise", and the search was to lead inwards to emotions, for it was necessary to find a way to express the restless stirrings of submerged feelings.

This year I have come to realise that "the lost paradise" is a symbol for unattainable harmony and perfection, which is an inner state quite different to the physical expression presented by Matisse. The slightly romantic image of Meditation II (plate 4) comes closest to an expression of inner harmony and contentment.

The journals of Anais Nin were an important discovery because they showed that a work of art could be constructed from intensely personal experiences and then assembled in fragments to create a whole. She writes: "Being true to my own experience, I discovered the basic theme of modern literature: man dismembered by analysis, by modern life, by modern technology, achieving a state of non-feeling, dangerous to his sanity and to his life."¹ Anais Nin's use of emotion, "non-feeling" or neurosis and psychoanalysis as subjects of her writing influenced me. My prints and drawings made between 1984 - 87 were concerned with disconnected emotions and were characterised by a disregard for rational and analytical ways of thinking in order to penetrate emotions more deeply.

Some prints created in 1988 contain the residue of these experiences. The woodcut Embrace (plate 2) is concerned with emotional experience. The nine part series Steps (plate 10 - four of which are represented) is an example of fragments contributing to a whole. Both Embrace and Steps suggest that emotions are only one aspect of inner life. Prints and drawings created this year show emotion as the starting point of experience, and at times emotion is transcended reaching the spiritual search and changing states of consciousness. The nine figures depicted in Steps (plate 10) show

various states of experience, some immersed in emotion, others searching for spiritual fullness and one attaining enlightenment and radiating. Embrace (plate 2) shows two figures entwined. One is depicted realistically, the other is suggested abstractly and through the suffusion of light. This relationship of two figures can be seen on a purely emotional level, or as the embrace of emotion and spirit.

An entry from my diary written in August 1988 sums up the changing directions of themes during the year: "What started as a private journey plotting difficulty, darkness and negativity, is an attempt to purge psychological trauma and sooth alienation from self, has become unexpectedly a search for higher ground and unity; a journey back and forth through changing consciousness with the clouded image of some mysterious divine element appearing, disappearing, touching, emanating, infusing."

Within the twentieth century there have been a number of artists who have used printmaking as an expressive medium. The German tradition (Die Brücke, der Blaue Reiter, and, more recently Kiefer, Immendorff and Baselitz) was influential for my work. I also looked at the prints of the Italian artists Palladino and Clemente for their use of mystical and religious symbolism within an expressive framework.

Munakata, the Japanese woodblock artist, was influential because his prints show that religious themes can be treated in an expressive manner, using wood as a medium. Munakata often painted the back of his prints with water colour, allowing the colour to bleed through the paper showing the unique potential of the monoprint. I discovered his work in 1987 while on a study trip to Japan. I worked for three months with Toshi Yoshida learning traditional Japanese woodblock techniques and it was from this experience that I became interested in working with water based inks as seen in the woodcut Entombed (plate 1).

My attraction to wood and lino as media for expression has to do with the way that marks can be formed on the surface - by scraping, scratching, cutting, jabbing, smearing and painting - and for the ability of the printed mark to preserve the energy and emotion of the initial stroke. This year I have used both wood and lino in an experimental way. Images have been formed by building up the surface of wood with gesso, as in Meditation I (plate 4) and Meditation II (plate 3), and, in some cases combining the cut mark with the painted as in Embrace (plate 2). Meditation I (plate 4) is an example of a monoprint created from gesso painted onto wood with fine lines scratched spontaneously into the surface of the wood immediately prior to printing. With lino I worked with caustic soda to etch a painterly image. It was discovered that varying intensities of caustic solution could create varying tones, something like an aquatint. An example of this is Spine (plate 7).

Another major discovery was the potential of plaster as a graphic medium, for its expressive quality of reproducing line. This can be seen in the plaster print Static (plate 6). Further development can be seen in the series Tablets (plates 8 & 9 - three of which are reproduced) showing the combination of etched lino background with plaster blocks superimposed on top.

From the Abstract Expressionist movement comes an interest in gestural markmaking, not for its own sake but rather for its expressive potential to contain the truth of the moment, or, to provide a key to the interior. The artist who was most influential on me, and the only one from this movement to concentrate on making prints, was Robert Motherwell. He states: "The subject does not pre-exist. It emerges out of the interaction between the artist and medium". "There is no knowing, only faith. The alternative is a black void".² This statement helped to confirm the rightness of the intuitive method when creating images. I did not decide on appropriate imagery and then go about creating it. I tried to put the rational analytical mind on hold and allow intuition to come through. The image appeared first. It slipped out of the unconscious when least expected, almost by surprise. Later it could be put into some form of context, and in retrospect, it has been the Expressionist tradition that has been most influential for my work.

Intuition

Much emphasis is placed on rational and analytical thought in our twentieth century culture. Belief in the imagination and intuition is often seen as something different or separate. A split exists between the two. As the intuitive way of working became more important for my image making I decided to investigate intuition from both Western and Eastern points of view.

Webster defines intuition as "the power of knowing, or knowledge obtained, without recourse or inference or reasoning".

Frances Vaughan, an American psychologist and scholar of Transpersonal psychology, has made a study of intuition. She draws attention to the conflict between left hemisphere thinking or "that which is predominantly rational, linear and verbal" and right hemisphere thinking or "that which is intuitive, holistic and orientated towards pattern perception".³ These ideas along with Gestalt thought, which favours the penetration of neurosis by feeling rather than thought, helped me to overcome the conflict between the rational and the intuitive when creating images. Spontaneous

documentation and the keeping of diaries become a way of working which favoured intuition as a source of visual imagery. The more freedom given to the intuitive practice, the more important the practice became.

Jung defined intuition as one of the four basic psychological functions - (the other three being thinking, feeling and sensation) - the function that explores the unknown, and senses possibilities and implications which may not be readily apparent. Jung's idea of intuition was that it is the function that makes contact with the collective unconscious, or, the source of all knowledge.

It was to Eastern philosophies that I turned next, where intuition is considered to be the faculty of mind which develops in the course of spiritual growth. In Buddhism, reason is seen as limited and the knowledge derived from it transient and unreliable. The Buddha taught that intuition, not reason, is the source of ultimate truth and wisdom. Buddhist ideas have grown out of the ancient Indian Yoga tradition, and it is from this tradition that meditation originated as a way of gaining and reaching enlightenment. Ajit Mookerjee, a writer on Indian art and Tantric studies says: "To realise through inner apprehension the oneness of all things by uniting the Self with the self, subject with object, zero with the infinite - to intuit the supreme knowledge is the purpose of yoga and its art". ⁴

My key for unlocking the inner world and opening the flow of intuition was the practice of meditation. The philosophy which made most sense as an explanation of what changes meditation produced within proved to be the Indian and Buddhist philosophies.

To quieten the mind is to expand awareness. My experience of mantra (private sound used repetitively) meditation was that it affected all aspects of my waking activity. Daniel Goleman, who has written a book on the varieties of meditative experience says: "As the states of his meditation weld with his waking activity, the awakened state ripens. When it reaches full maturity, it lastingly changes his consciousness, transforming his experience and his universe". ⁵ The practice of meditation has the ability to change consciousness, and it is through this change that it is possible to take a step towards "the lost paradise" and glimpse the source of intuition which is perfection. The change from one level of consciousness to another has been from a more primitive emotional world of attachment to feeling and sensation to a more enlightened, finely perceived world with some of self, in harmony with all things, and a growing spiritual awareness.

In ancient Greek culture references can be found to the knowledge within and the individuals ability to find it. The mystic who crystallised thought of "the one" for the West was Plotinus, the Great Neoplatonist (A.D. 204-270), who said: 'Knowledge has

three degrees - opinion, science and illumination. The means or instrument of the first is sense; of the second dialectic; of the third intuition. The last is absolute knowledge founded on the identity of the mind knowing with the object known". 6

In the East similar ideas existed from the teachings of the only documented Buddha (500 B.C. onwards) who also taught that intuition was the source of ultimate truth. The geographical extent of the ancient Greek world may help to explain the similarity of ideas of East and West at this time.

From early Christian times to the twentieth century, the individual's access to spiritual knowledge was largely through organised religions. The author Phillip Rawson in his essay on Western Visions 7 points to the Roman Christian church for promoting the idea that the individual can only have communication with God through organised religion and the church, not by direct contact. The meditative practice offers a clear path for the individual to communicate directly with the spiritual realm, outside of organised religion. The explanations of the highest forms of knowledge as offered by Plotinus parallel those ideas of the Indian Yoga and Buddhist philosophies.

It is now, as organised religion breaks down and fails to provide answers, that Eastern philosophies and the writings of the Neoplatonists are turned to in search of truth. The meditative practice and what it has led me to have been the main concerns of this year's work. The visual image was used to document the voyage and satisfy the need to externalise what was experienced. The prints Meditation I & II (plates 4 & 3) are part of a series of five prints which try to present a visual equivalent of various meditative experiences. The blurred and undefined edges of forms merge with the surrounding ground. Textural qualities of surface permeate through forms and space. Energy lines move through figures and out into the surrounding atmosphere, also charged with energy. Light is diffused and moves independently in and out of forms. These devices can be seen as attempts to describe a merging of figure and space, subject and object and the fleeting sensation of "oneness" one experiences during meditation.

I am not interested in facial or bodily details because they are not aspects of the meditative experience. There is however a remaining sense of bodily form during the experience - the boundary of which is uncertain - and so it is within the prints. The change from one experience to another, or the shift of changing consciousness is the subject of the series.

The experience of meditation is of such a transforming nature that when I give myself over to the intuitive when making images, it is the same image with some variation that repeats itself, again and again, demanding some type of visual exorcism. This

explains the constant reference to the human form usually in its most basic or simple state. The images that I create are not glimpsed during meditation, but arise from a need to express something of altered consciousness experienced during waking activity.

The images that have developed intuitively this year all have some reference to the physical world - they are not purely abstract. Gestural markmaking, with its abstract qualities, describes the mood or atmosphere of emotional and spiritual experience but it is the representational form that helps to locate the experience.

The human form is the image used most. It symbolises the searcher during various stages of the inner journey. I have already mentioned the series Steps (plate 10) as a series of images referring to this idea. Another series of prints Tablets (plates 8 & 9) uses the same theme. This year I have looked at much Aboriginal art and have met and worked with Aboriginal artists. There has been some influence particularly from looking at cave drawings of the ancestors of the Dreamtime. It is the simplicity and economy of these images that appeals to me, creating symbols of omnipotence. Static (plate 6) is an example of the human form at its most essential, expressed by a simple line carved from a plaster block. Cocoon (plate 2) is a symbol of human potential, still forming and waiting in a womb of energy waiting for release. From Indian and Buddhist art comes the image of the meditation posture or "lotus position". Both Eastern and Western religious art have used images which are centred on the body and are often symmetrical, investing the forms with power, balance and omnipotence. I have borrowed this device to describe figures imbued with an emerging spirituality, a strengthening identity and personal power.

In September 1988, on a trip to Eden on the New South Wales southcoast, a sandstone tower built by Boyd as a whaling station watch tower imposed itself as a symbol of the search and struggle for enlightenment. This symbol is also related to the archetypal image as depicted on the tarot card - a symbol for psychic shock, and the breaking open of old consciousness by divine intervention - both painful and profitable. I have used this image in two works - The Tower and Inside the Tower.

The doorway or gate is another symbol used in the works Gates and Houses. It is a symbol for the threshold of inner experience, the possibility of enlightenment or futility and confusion. In Houses the doorway represents the structure that houses organised religions, another possible alternative for spiritual experience.

In my work explicit references to the great religious traditions are few, for I found that it

was more of a personal sense of religion, outside of the organised systems, that I was looking for and wanting to describe visually. There is greater affinity with Indian Yoga tradition and the practice of meditation with its emphasis on experience rather than dogma. Indian yoga art produced very few examples of personal meditative imagery. "Yantras" or power diagrams were used which act as bridges connecting the outside and inside worlds. They are diagrammatic in character but I am more interested in describing actual and personal experience through the human figure.

I looked to other artists who tried to accommodate Eastern thought with Western thought. Looking at other artists' work was useful because it showed various ways of translating the spiritual experience. Western thought is based on the duality of subject and object, and the split between spirit and matter. Eastern thought, on the other hand, is concerned with the intuitive and its search for oneness. Its goal is a merging with all things; being a part of everything. Devices which have been helpful for others and which I have noted include - the "all overness" of surface, simplification of form and the radiance of colour and light.

Mark Tobey's paintings were very much an attempt to combine the Western perception as a multiplicity of separate objects, with the "oneness" of Eastern thought. The "oneness" becomes evident in the overall continuing surface, as individual objects merge into its very nature.

Jackson Pollock's work is also concerned with ongoing "oneness", but here the emotional struggle is not transcended as it is in Tobey's work.

Mark Rothko sought a world beyond painting evident from what he said about his paintings: "They are not paintings". Bonnie Clearwater in her book on Rothko says: "In all the essays into boundlessness that Rothko undertook, the goal (perhaps only dimly perceived by the artist himself) was always the same: to get as close to his intuition of radiance as he could".⁸ Rothko's means for revealing spiritual experience is through the use of radiant colourations.

Van Gogh also used colour for the same purposes. In one of his last letters to his brother he writes: "I want to paint men and women with that something of the eternal which the halo used to symbolise, and which we seek to convey by the actual radiance and vibration of our colour".⁹

A developing theme in my own work this year has been the radiance of light - the light that directs and emanates from the human spirit as part of the ongoing struggle of existence.

Conclusion

This year's study has helped to clarify my concerns as an artist and has presented new areas for further development. The inner journey is firmly established as a major theme. The tracing of the inner journey began with a yearning for the harmony of 'the lost paradise', turned inward to restore the imbalance of 'non-feeling' through an immersion in emotion and sensation, and finally led to the stirrings of the spiritual search. The great adventure is the move inwards, to describe inner states, and to allow intuition to unfold and to trust it as a source of imagery. The actual source of intuition is perceived more through the meditative experience rather than rational thinking. What was found through the experience seemed more lost than new, covered by layers waiting to be rediscovered. It is from this that stems the interest in images of ancient cultures, often in a state of decay, alluding to ancient knowledge which may have been lost.

I see my work as part of the Romantic tradition with its interest in the interior world, emotions and the imagination. The English Romantic poet Coleridge wrote in his note book: "Saturday Night, April 14, 1805-- In looking at objects of Nature while I am thinking, as at yonder moon dim-glimmering thro' the dewy window-pane, I seem rather to be seeking, as it were *asking*, a symbolical language for something within me that already and forever exists, than observing any thing new. Even when that latter is the case, yet still I have always an obscure feeling as if that new phenomenon were the dim Awakening of forgotten or hidden Truth of my inner Nature/It is still interesting as a Word, a Symbol! It is, the Creator! <and the Evolver!>". ¹⁰

The "moon" becomes a symbol for the eternal within and "forgotten truths" alludes to the source of knowledge within. These ideas parallel Jungian thought and Eastern philosophies with their notions that within us are the answers to all things. "The dewy window pane" is a metaphor for that which obscures such knowledge, or the level of consciousness from which the poet perceives. "The dewy window pane" can be observed in my own work for I am interested in images which are hazy, blurry and unclear for my perceptions of the divine. The source of intuition is partially obscured, occasionally glimpsed and bound by my own level of consciousness.

All that I am sure of is my own experience and as an artist this is what I have to offer. Anais Nin's work methods reflect my own: "I work by flashes of intuition, a succession of illuminations. Far more is revealed in a selected moment than in a huge construction of details". ¹¹ This way of working has led to a questioning of printmaking as a suitable means of expression. I found that by being true to the experience of a particular moment resulted in the making of monoprints as well as printed editions. However the appeal of the printed mark is confirmed. There is a sense of working with other forces - the grain of the wood, the quality of the surfaces of plaster and lino - and there is a certain mystery in the unexpected contribution of the medium. It is through the indirect mark that I have chosen to create images, and it is the indirect or unseen world that I attempt to experience and reveal.

LIST OF PLATES

(dimensions in cms)

1. Entombed (Jun 1988), watercolour woodcut, 90 x 52.
2. Embrace (Jun 1988), woodcut and collograph on wood, 88 x 67.
3. Meditation II (May 1988), collograph on wood, 88 x 67.
4. Meditation I (May 1988), collograph on wood, 88 x 67.
5. Cocoon (Apr 1988), collograph on wood, 61 x 34.
6. Static (Aug 1988), plaster print, 56 x 50.
7. Spine (Jul 1988), etched lino print, 56 x 49.
- 8 & 9. Tablets (Nov 1988), plaster and etched lino prints, 51 x 18, 49 x 51, 24 x 24.
10. Steps (Oct 1988), four of nine images in the series, woodcuts, 22 x 20, 19 x 13, 24 x 20, 23 x 19.

Notes

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2. Stephanie Terenzio, The Prints of Robert Motherwell, New York, 1984, 9.
3. Frances E. Vaughan, Awakening Intuition, New York, 1979, 56.
4. Ajit Mookergee, Yoga Art, London, 1974, 20.
5. Daniel Goleman, The Varieties of Meditative Experience, New York, 1977, 118.
6. Plotinus, Enneads, English trans. by S. MacKenna, 3rd edn. revised by B. S. Page, London, 1962.
7. Phillip Rawson and Ajit Mookergee, Yoga Art, London, 1974, 20.
8. Bonnie Clearwater, Mark Rothko: Works on Paper, New York, 1984, 12 & 13.
9. Vincent Van Gogh, Dear Theo: The Autobiography of Vincent Van Gogh, ed. Irving Stone and Jean Stone, London, 1937, 454.
10. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, The Notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, ed, Kathleen Coburn, Volume 1-2, London, 1962, Volume 1, 2546.
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PLATES



















